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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 001397

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/22/2018
TAGS: [ES](#) [KCRM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: EL SALVADOR READY TO SIGN MERIDA INITIATIVE LETTER
OF AGREEMENT

Classified By: The Ambassador, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (U) This is an action message; see para. six below.

12. (U) On December 18, DCM and Embassy San Salvador Law Enforcement Committee presented the Merida Initiative draft Letter of Agreement (LOA) to the Salvadoran government. The Salvadorans, represented by the Minister of Public Security and Justice Rene Figueroa, Vice Minister of Public Security and Justice Astor Escalante, Director of National Civilian Police (PNC) Jose Luis Tobar Prieto, Deputy Attorney General Romeo Barahona, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs defense and security advisor Francisco Gonzalez, expressed gratitude and enthusiasm for the Merida Initiative programs proposed for El Salvador. The PNC Director and the Minister of Public Security and Justice both stated that they would ensure that the Salvadoran entities receiving Merida assistance make the best possible use of additional resources and training.

13. (C) The Salvadorans indicated that they are ready to sign the Merida LOA as presented, with the stipulation that they prefer to have both the Minister of Public Security and Justice (MPSJ) and the Minister of Foreign Affairs sign the final document. They also indicated, however, that they feel obligated to submit the LOA to the GOES legal advisor in order to determine if it must be voted upon by the Legislative Assembly prior to signature. Minister Figueroa told us that he would have the results of the legal analysis "within ten days." When pressed further as to the possibility that submitting the LOA to the Legislative Assembly could cause undue delays in Merida Initiative implementation, the Minister assured us that the ruling ARENA party Legislative Assembly bloc and its allies "have sufficient votes to get this approved quickly," and that he would personally lobby key Legislative Assembly Deputies to act on the LOA expeditiously.

14. (C) Comment: While Minister Figueroa is enthusiastic about the Merida Initiative and ready to sign the LOA quickly, he is also obviously moving to shield the Saca administration and the ruling ARENA party from any potential FMLN (leftist, opposition) accusations of usurping Legislative Assembly prerogatives or using the Merida Initiative for political purposes. Minister Figueroa also realizes that the FMLN would be foolish to vote against a public security assistance package on the eve of municipal, legislative, and presidential elections in January and March 2009, respectively.

15. (C) Comment continued: Although we understand the political calculus behind Minister Figueroa's actions, we will nonetheless guard against any developments that could unduly delay GOES signature of the Merida Initiative LOA.

16. (U) Action request: In light of GOES willingness to sign the LOA as presented, we request that the Department send the Merida Initiative funds to post as soon as feasible. Once we have the Merida funds on hand, we can quickly prepare the face sheets and final versions of the LOA and present them to

the GOES for signature.
GLAZER